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Introduction

Nihao, fellow Warriors lovers. I hope you enjoy the book that you are about to read. Updates will be a bit slow for personal and school reasons, so don't DM me asking me when the next chapter will be out.

Also, a disclaimer. I do not own the Warriors series. It belongs to Erin Hunter, the phenomenal ladies who wrote the books. This book would not be possible at all without them.

Constructive criticism and corrections from you readers is accepted and welcomed, but please don't be rude about it.

So, without further ado, let's get this book started. From this moment, you will enter the world of...

Thorns and Roses.

Honorable Mentions

Since I have multiple very supportive people of this story, and some very helpful people, I think that they deserve to have their names mentioned, and not just in the description. I am very grateful to and for these people showing wonderful support and awesome help.

SandPetal , you have supported this book since the prologue was posted. Thank you very much for the meow-velous support!

AsiaFire , thank you for the wonderful support and comments! It's really helped the development of this book and I really appreciate it!

WoodSpyder , thank you for the great support on this book! I really appreciate it!

I am sure that this list will continue to grow, and I genuinely hope that it does!

ALLEGIANCES • RIVER CLAN

RiverClan

Leader: Troutstar- a light brown ticked tabby tom with gray-green eyes and large paws

Deputy: Lilywhisker- a light brown and white cap-and-saddle she-cat with light green eyes

Medicine Cat: Featherleaf- a white she-cat with gray eyes
Apprentice, Gingerpaw

Warriors: Mistheart- a dark gray Maine Coon she-cat with brown eyes

Pebblefoot- a black tom with amber eyes and large feet

Carptail- a white tomcat with a short, fluffy tail and blue eyes and a blind right eye

Reedsong- a brown she-cat with blue eyes and a short tail

Stonetooth- a solid dark gray tom with brown eyes and broad shoulders and a long tail

Fernbreeze- a silver she-cat with dark forest green eyes

Shadepath- a small, slender black she-cat with brown eyes, a long tail, and a white splotch on her chest
Apprentice, Larkpaw

Pikefur- a brown tom with gray eyes and a thin, slender build
Apprentice, Creampaw

Frogleap- a light gray tabby tom with light green eyes

Oakstep- a brown tom with broad shoulders and yellow eyes

Birchface- a cream colored tabby tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Twigpaw

Minnowstrike- a dark gray she-cat with bright blue eyes
Apprentice, Echopaw

Mossear- a silver she-cat with bright green eyes
Apprentice, Blossompaw

Ripplereed- a brown calico she-cat with gray-green eyes

Birdwhisper- a black she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Rockpaw

Rainear- a scruffy gray tom with blue eyes

Maplefur- a white, orange, and black calico she-cat with gray-green eyes

Apprentices: Larkpaw- a small white she-cat with brown markings on her back and head, brown eyes and a long, wispy, tail

Blossompaw- a white and brown cap and saddle she-cat with yellow eyes

Echopaw- a dark gray and black Siamese she-cat with brown eyes

Twigpaw- a dark brown tom with scraggly fur with gray eyes

Creampaw- a cream colored tom with a short tail with blue eyes

Rockpaw- a light gray tom with dark blue eyes

Gingerpaw- a ginger tabby she-cat with a white tail-tip and green eyes

Queens: Heronfoot- a red tortoiseshell she-cat with orange eyes

Quailfeather- a long-legged silver she-cat with brown eyes

Elders: Mudfoot- a brown tom with amber eyes

Leaffur- a ginger tabby she-cat with light green eyes

Salmonfur- a pale cream tom with a scarred muzzle from battle and yellow eyes

ALLEGIANCES•THUNDERCLAN

ThunderClan

Leader: Thrushstar- a brown tuxedo tom with a bushy tail and yellow eyes

Deputy: Amberfrost- a russet-red Somali with brown eyes and a long tail

Medicine Cat: Frostfern- a Russian Blue she-cat with pale blue eyes
Apprentice, Violetpaw

Warriors: Sunheart- a bright orange tortoiseshell-tabby she cat with black stripes and yellow eyes
Apprentice, Foxpaw

Sootfoot- a dark gray tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Ashpaw

Sorrelfur- a ginger tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes

Gingerpelt- a ginger tabby tom with dark green eyes

Cloudnose- a small white tom with long hair and gray eyes

Dawnfall- a golden-orange marbled tabby she-cat with orange eyes

Apprentice, Redpaw

Darksky- a black tabby tom with green eyes

Emberfoot- a fiery-orange she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Sparrowpaw

Rosewing- a brown tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with yellow eyes

Apprentices: Foxpaw- a tawny she-cat with dark yellow eyes

Ashpaw- a dark gray tabby tom with slightly lighter gray stripes and green eyes

Redpaw- a red tabby tom with hazel eyes

Sparrowpaw- a short-furred tortoiseshell and white she-cat with yellow eyes

Violetpaw- a long-furred light gray she-cat with gray-blue eyes

Queens: Silverfur- a silver she-cat with crystal blue eyes and a long, feathery tail

Elders: Pinewhisker- a dark brown tom with dark green eyes

Robinfeather- a red tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes

Pigeontalon- a light gray she-cat with blue eyes

Beechleg- a tan tom with gray eyes and a short tail

ALLEGIANCES•SHADOWCLAN

ShadowClan

Leader: Vulturestar- a dark gray tom with lighter gray patches, broad shoulders, and amber eyes

Deputy: Morningmist - a dilute calico she-cat with brown eyes
Apprentice, Marshpaw

Medicine Cat: Mudpool- a scraggly dark brown tom with yellow eyes

Warriors: Rattail- a gray tom with half of a tail and amber eyes

Cloverdapple- a mostly black with orange and white calico she-cat and orange eyes
Apprentice, Swamppaw

Poppydawn- a long-legged black tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes

Runningstep- a dark brown tom with unkempt fur and amber eyes

Silvermask- a black she-cat with white markings on her face that look like a mask, and brown eyes
Apprentice, Juniperpaw

Toadfoot- a light brown tuxedo tom with bright green eyes

Frogleg- a black tom with yellow eyes

Skypelt- a white tom with dark blue eyes

Firebriar- a bright orange LaPerm she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Spottedpaw

Batfang- a brown she-cat with messy, short, fur and yellowish-orange eyes
Apprentice, Lilypadpaw

Brambleheart- a light brown tom with darker brown stripes and brown eyes

Appledawn- a reddish tabby tom with orange eyes

Cloudchaser- a fluffy white she-cat with green eyes and a short tail

Newtfoot- a dark brownish-gray tom with gray-green eyes

Apprentices: Marshpaw- a white tom with small light brown splotches and dark green eyes

Swamppaw- a light brown she-cat with large white splotches with bright green eyes

Juniperpaw- a dark brown she-cat with orange eyes

Spottedpaw- a white tom with black spots and yellow eyes

Lilypadpaw- a white she-cat with light gray-green eyes

Queens: Adderlight- a tan she-cat with dark brown stripes and orange eyes

Sparrowbloom- a brown she-cat with darker brown markings and yellow eyes

Elders: Grassfire- a feisty black she-cat with green eyes

Acornfur- a brown tom with white markings and orange eyes

Ferretleap- a brown tom with scraggly fur, a long tail, and amber eyes

ALLEGIANCES • WINDCLAN

WindClan

Leader: Finchstar- a tan she-cat with small dark brown markings and beetle-black eyes

Deputy: Willowfall- a light gray marbled tabby she-cat with green-gray eyes

Warriors: Breezeheart- an orange and white tabby tom with black stripes and amber eyes

Apprentice, Doepaw

Gorseclaw- a ginger and white tabby tom with amber eyes

Heatherfur- a pale brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

Cinderclaw- a fluffy light gray she-cat with blue eyes

Rabbitfoot- a gray tuxedo tom with gray eyes
Apprentice, Fawnpaw

Eggflight- a white she-cat with amber eyes

Stormrunner- a lithe, long-legged dark gray tabby tom with pale green eyes
Apprentice, Smokepaw

Snowthorn- a white she-cat with blue eyes

Blacknose- a black tom with yellow eyes

Grassbird- a small brown tabby tom with dark green eyes

Sandfoot- a cream tabby she-cat with copper eyes
Apprentice, Sagepaw

Milktooth- a white she-cat with yellow eyes

Deerwhisker- a dark brown tom with white spots and brown eyes

Darkbranch- a black she-cat with green eyes

Weaseltail- a russet-red tom with a white chest and belly, and brown eyes
Apprentice, Hoppaw

Apprentices: Doepaw- a brown she-cat with white spots on her back and orange eyes

Fawnpaw- a tan she-cat with white spots on her back and yellow eyes

Smokepaw- a light gray tom with green eyes

Sagepaw- a dark gray she-cat with white toes, a white belly and amber eyes

Hoppaw- a black tabby tom with a short tail and yellow eyes

Queens: Flowertail- a cream she-cat with light gray splotches and yellow eyes

Acornleaf- a light brown she-cat with a white chest, paws, and tail-tip, and gray eyes

Elders: Morningstream- a silver she-cat with green-blue eyes

Rainwhisker- a light gray tom with darker gray stripes and dark blue eyes

Nightwhisper- a black tom with yellow eyes

Prolouge

"What do you mean I can't have kits!?" The brown tortoiseshell queen wailed. Her wail could be heard throughout the whole camp.

"I'm sorry... but this is your third stillborn litter... You can give birth, but I don't think the kits will be alive, no matter how many times you try." The silvery-blue she-cat standing beside the queen shook her head solemnly, her pale blue eyes gleaming with sympathy.

"But what if Darksky leaves me!?" The brown queen fretted. She continued licking her kits, hoping that they would start breathing soon.

"If he truly loves you, he won't care whether or not you can have kits. He should still love you, whether you can have kits or not." The bluish she-cat comforted the tortoiseshell queen.

"But...!" The brown tortoiseshell yowled in agony. Just then, a kit moved- one that looked exactly like its father. The tortoiseshell queen gasped.

"Frostfern! This kit moved! Help me!" The tortoiseshell queen commanded. The silvery-blue she-cat named Frostfern looked at her.

"What do you mean? There's no way a kit is aliv- oh my StarClan!" Frostfern gasped. She started licking the kit with the grief-stricken queen. The kit squirmed, but it stopped moving and breathing after a few moments. The brown queen yowled in anguish once more.

"Why must StarClan punish me this way!?" The queen wailed. "What have I done to deserve this agonizing punishment?! I hope every StarClan cat rots in the Dark Forest someday! Have them be forgotten, and forever shunned, those fox-hearted pieces of dung!"

Frostfern gave the queen a comforting lick, looking a bit

uncomfortable after the tortoiseshell had just talked to StarClan that way.

"I'm sorry..." Frostfern meowed softly. A silver tabby queen looked at the tortoiseshell queen with pity.

"I'm so sorry. If there's anything I can do to help, please just let me know..." The silver queen mewed softly, her ice blue eyes gleaming with sympathy.

The tortoiseshell queen's head whipped toward the silver queen.

"I don't need your pity!" The tortoiseshell queen growled. "Just because you'll see your kits healthy, and all grown up someday doesn't mean that you have to rub it in, Silverfur!"

The silver queen, Silverfur, winced. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to- I wasn't trying to-"

"Save it for the Dark Forest when they accept you into their ranks!" The tortoiseshell queen snarled.

Silverfur gasped, and looked at the tortoiseshell queen in shock, her blue eyes shining with hurt and shock.

Frostfern had left without either of the queens noticing, and she had just come back with some poppy seeds for the tortoiseshell queen's shock, and some chamomile for the tortoiseshell queen's stress. Frostfern also carried another bundle of herbs; some borage leaves for Silverfur.

Frostfern placed the herbs in front of the queens. She nosed the borage toward Silverfur, who obediently chewed them up without a single complaint.

Frostfern picked up the poppy seeds and chamomile, and gave them to Rosewing, who grudgingly licked them up.

The tortoiseshell queen was... Different... After giving birth to three stillborn litters in a row- her only three litters. Her eyes were glazed over for the next couple of sunrises, almost as if she was thinking of something, or in a dream-like state...

A brown tortoiseshell tortoiseshell she-cat with her pelt littered with small stars sighed, shaking her head, and turned to the she-cat next to her.

"Sorrelberry, there must be *something* we can do." The tortoiseshell she-cat pleaded.

Sorrelberry shook her ginger-brown head that was flecked with stars, as well. "I'm sorry, Briarleaf. Things just weren't meant to be."

"But that is my daughter suffering down there, and your niece!" The brown tortoiseshell, named Briarleaf, cried out. "How can you just stand by idly and not do anything!? We're just sitting here, waiting for disaster to happen!"

Sorrelberry sighed. "You don't understand, Briarleaf... These things are meant to be. Everything has a purpose."

"Just because you're older than me doesn't mean that you can act like some sort of smart piece of fox-dung!" Briarleaf retorted, her orange eyes blazing.

"Just because your daughter is suffering doesn't mean that you can call your sister a piece of fox-dung!" Sorrelberry snarled, stalking off.

Briarleaf just sighed sadly and sat down, watching her daughter from StarClan...

Chapter 1- Stonetooth's Teasing

"Stonetooth! Stonetooth! Stonetooth!" The yowls of the new warrior's name, Stonetooth, formerly Stonepaw, could be heard throughout the RiverClan camp. Out of all of the yowling, Larkpaw's yowl could be heard the loudest.

Stonetooth padded up to Larkpaw, his kithood friend, after the ceremony had finished.

"Maybe you should go catch a carp for me." Stonetooth tried to tell Larkpaw in a serious voice; he failed miserably, however.

Larkpaw grinned playfully at Stonetooth.

"Just because you're a warrior now doesn't mean you get to boss me around!" Larkpaw whined.

"Of course it does. I'm your senior. I'm in a higher position of power." Stonetooth purred.

"Well, yes, that's true," Larkpaw rolled her eyes, "but that doesn't mean you can abuse that power, you fish-brain! Plus, you just became a warrior! You haven't even been a warrior for half of a moon!"

"I suppose so." Stonetooth rolled his eyes playfully. "I shouldn't be bossing small apprentices like you around."

Larkpaw snorted. "You're only taller than me by half of Rattail's tail!"

"You mean that grumpy elder from ShadowClan?!" Stonetooth asked, slightly offended.

"No, he's not an elder yet." Larkpaw meowed. "He's still a warrior. Though I suppose he'll be living with the elders soon. Just like I'll be living in the warrior's den, as a *warrior* in half of a moon if I pass my assessment!"

"If you're tall enough, that is." Stonetooth meowed, letting a small *mrrrow* of laughter escape him.

"Hey! That's not funny!" Larkpaw retorted. "Plus, as far as I know, there isn't a certain height you have to be to become a warrior!"

Stonetooth purred again. "There should be."

Larkpaw let out a snort of resentment. "Then does that mean you can't be a warrior because you're too tall?"

"I'm not too tall! You're just too short!" Stonetooth playfully shouldered her.

Larkpaw purred, and rolled her eyes at him. "Says the cat who admitted that he was too tall when he was an apprentice."

"I didn't say that!" Stonetooth defended himself.

"Yes, you did!" Larkpaw purred.

"No, I didn't-" Stonetooth was interrupted by the Clan deputy, Lilywhisker.

"Break it up, you two!" Lilywhisker meowed, purring slightly at the sight of the two Clanmates arguing. "Stonetooth, how would you like going on your first hunting patrol as a warrior?"

Stonetooth's brown eyes gleamed with excitement and anticipation. "When? Of course I would! I would love to!"

Larkpaw purred at her friend's excitement. "Be quiet, Stonetooth, or you might scare all of the fish away."

"You be quiet!" Stonetooth meowed, moving his paw to cuff her on the ear. Larkpaw ducked and Stonetooth missed.

"Frog dung..." Stonetooth muttered. "I'll get you next time."

"Good luck trying." Larkpaw mewed smugly.

"Alright, you two. Anyways, Stonetooth, we're about to leave, so

hurry up." Lilywhisker ordered him, padding toward the camp entrance.

"Okay, coming!" Stonetooth called to her. "Bye, Larkpaw! Catch you later!"

He raced off.

Larkpaw let out a small purr of amusement. She turned around to go to the apprentice's den, but when she turned around, Shadepath, her mentor, was right in front of her.

"Have you forgotten already, Larkpaw?" Shadepath meowed, slightly annoyed. "We're supposed to be practicing your battle skills right now. I said we could do it after the ceremony, and it's after the ceremony. We should already be at the Beech Copse by now!"

"Huh-? Oh, I'm really sorry, Shadepath!" Larkpaw flattened her ears in embarrassment. "I'll make it up to you by training even harder today!"

Shadepath let out a small purr. "I don't see how much harder you *can* work. You've been working almost nonstop ever since you were made an apprentice."

"Sorry!" Larkpaw squeaked.

"Nothing to be sorry for. Now, let's get to the Beech Copse." Shadepath turned on her heel, walking briskly toward said place. Larkpaw trotted after her.

Once Larkpaw saw the thick clusters of beech trees, she trotted a bit faster. Once Shadepath and Larkpaw slipped in through the gaps between the trees, they immediately stood across from each other, tails swishing and their backs slightly arched.

"How about you try out the leap-and-hold tactic I showed you a while ago? It really comes in handy if you're smaller than most warriors." Shadepath told Larkpaw.

"Okay." Larkpaw agreed, slightly disgruntled; her mentor had just called her small! While Larkpaw wouldn't deny that she was a lot

smaller than most apprentices, she didn't like cats continuously pointing it out to her.

"Ready?" Shadepath asked. Larkpaw nodded her brown and white head, and brown eyes gleaming with anticipation.

"Go!" Shadepath yowled. Larkpaw sprinted and leaped at Shadepath, who quickly sidestepped. Larkpaw landed on the ground on all fours, digging unsheathed claws into the ground to stop her from sliding. Larkpaw sheathed her claws again, and faced her mentor.

She circled Shadepath with her back arched. As Shadepath moved to make a front paw blow, Larkpaw ducked and ran behind her mentor. She jumped onto Shadepath's back, making sure to keep her claws sheathed.

Shadepath, reacting quickly, dropped down and rolled over. Larkpaw hopped off her mentor's back before she was squished. Larkpaw was panting slightly, and her brown orbs gleamed with anticipation.

"Great job!" Shadepath praised her apprentice. "How about we try the jump-and pin move I taught you about a half of a moon ago?"

Larkpaw nodded, her eyes still gleaming with excitement and anticipation.

Shadepath and Larkpaw lined up a couple of tail-lengths across from each once more, eyes focused and sharp, looking for movement of their opponent. Larkpaw arched her back, slowly stalking backward, away from Shadepath. Shadepath ran toward Larkpaw as Larkpaw leaped backwards, jumping off of a nearby beech tree. Larkpaw landed on Shadepath's back, clinging on like a burr, but with her claws sheathed. Shadepath moved to roll, but Larkpaw raised a paw and landed a weak front paw blow on her mentor's head. Shadepath rolled over just as Larkpaw leaped off, and in front of her mentor. She reared on her hind legs, swiping her sheathed paws at Shadepath's muzzle and the top of her head.

Shadepelt backed up a couple of steps, and leaped toward Larkpaw,

who tried to sidestep, but she was too late. Shadepath pinned Larkpaw down, and Larkpaw pummeled Shadepath's belly with her hind legs. This had no effect, so Larkpaw went limp, playing dead. Shadepath grinned in triumph, thinking that she had won the mock battle, and moved to get off of Larkpaw.

Larkpaw, however, didn't give up that easily. Larkpaw sprang up, moving most of her weight toward the front of her body to make her blow more effective. Shadepath, too shocked to react, tried to roll over to her right, but didn't make it in time.

Larkpaw pinned Shadepath down, and placed a paw over her throat. Shadepath surrendered, and Larkpaw hopped off of her.

"Nice job!" Shadepath panted, after taking a moment to catch her breath. "I taught you well, didn't I?"

Larkpaw purred. "Of course you did! You're one of the best warriors in the Clan!"

Shadepath purred. "No, I'm not. Anyways, we should probably get back- you want to find out if you're going to the Gathering tonight, right?"

"Huh?" Larkpaw asking, tilting her head to the side. "Oh, yeah! Tonight is the full moon!"

"Of course it is. Now hurry back to camp to go find out!" Shadepath ordered. Larkpaw quickly dipped her head in thanks, and raced off to camp.

She entered camp, and arrived just in time to see Troutstar beginning to announce the names of the cats attending the Gathering.

"Larkpaw, Shadepath, Carptail, Minnowstrike, Pikefur, Oakstep, Blossompaw, Salmonfur, Leaffur, Mudfoot, and Twigpaw." Troutstar announced, padding back to his den. Lilywhisker nodded curtly toward the warriors attending the gathering. It had become Lilywhisker's way ever since she became deputy to just nod her head at the attending cats, silently signaling for them to rest up and

eat something before the Gathering.

Larkpaw silently cheered before looking for Stonetooth. Stonetooth must've been looking for her, too, because a heartbeat later, Stonetooth came bounding up to her.

"Are you excited?" Stonetooth asked her.

Larkpaw playfully rolled her eyes. "Of course I am, frog-brain."

He gently cuffed her on the ear. "You don't have to be so mean about it!"

"Sorry." Larkpaw purred, trying not to laugh, but failing miserably, letting out a *mrrow* of amusement.

"Anyways, I should probably rest and then have something to eat before the Gathering." Larkpaw meowed, padding over to the apprentice's den. She lie down in her mossy nest lined with feathers and reeds, and fell into a light, yet peaceful, sleep.

Larkpaw awoke after what seemed like just a couple of heartbeats, however, it was sun-down now, instead of sunhigh, like it was when Larkpaw fell asleep.

Larkpaw stretched quickly. She padded outside the den, heading over to the fresh-kill pile. She grabbed a small carp and sat down next to Stonetooth.

"Okay, so I know that this is our the sixth Gathering in our entire lives, but, is it just me, or is it still really exciting?" Larkpaw meowed, taking a bite of her carp.

"You're just overreacting," Stonetooth teased her, "And besides, it's not like this is going to be any different from all of the other Gatherings that me and you have attended. It's just that I won't be there. I'll be sitting vigil."

"You're probably right." Larkpaw mused, thinking back on all of the other Gatherings they had went to as apprentices. They had been to

every Gathering held when they were apprentices, maybe because she was Troutstar's niece, or simply because they worked hard; no cat knew except for Troutstar himself.

The only really exciting thing that happened at the Gatherings that Stonetooth and Larkpaw had been to was listening to the gossiping queens and eavesdropping on the elder's conversations.

"But it's too bad that you won't be there." Larkpaw meowed sadly. "I wish you were."

"Me too." Stonetooth meowed sadly. "But it won't really be any different."

Larkpaw was about to meow something back, but then Troutstar came out of his den with Lilywhisker.

Troutstar padded toward the center of camp with Lilywhisker at his side.

"Those cats who have been chosen to go to the Gathering tonight, please gather around! We will be leaving shortly!" Troutstar yowled.

"Sorry, I should go!" Larkpaw meowed. "Bye!"

"Okay, bye!" Stonetooth meowed after her.

As Larkpaw trotted over toward Troutstar and Lilywhisker, she could see the slightly annoyed or sad faces of those cats who weren't able to come, and the excitement gleaming in the eyes who were chosen. Larkpaw could clearly see the disappointment is Stonetooth's eyes; Stonetooth had to sit vigil for the night.

"Tell me what happens, okay?" Stonetooth meowed to Larkpaw. Larkpaw nodded, and licked his ear affectionately before padding toward Troutstar.

Larkpaw could see the other warriors that were attending padding over, and she heard Troutstar meow.

"Is every cat attending here? Good, now let's get going! We wouldn't

want to be late." Troutstar meowed loudly, and starting walking in the direction of the stepping stones. Lilywhisker followed right behind him, as did the other cats coming to the Gathering.

Larkpaw couldn't wait. She bounded toward the front of the group of cats. Shadepath trotted over to Larkpaw.

"It's your sixth Gathering, Larkpaw. How is this still so exciting?" Shadepath meowed, a gleam of amusement shining in her eye.

Larkpaw purred. "I can't help it!"

Larkpaw hopped on the stepping stones along with her Clanmates in front of and behind her. Soon, the group of RiverClanners arrived at Fourtrees.

Larkpaw watched as Troutstar hopped onto his spot on the Great Rock. She looked around, and saw only ShadowClan.

"It looks like we're the second ones here." Larkpaw meowed to Shadepath. She looked at Featherleaf sitting near the edge of the Great Rock, to the left of Troutstar. Lilywhisker sat near the edge of the Great Rock as well, but to the right of her superior. The ShadowClan leader, medicine cat, and deputy sat in the same formation.

Larkpaw licked her paw and drew it over her head. She did this several times until she saw ThunderClan arrive. Larkpaw saw a just one ThunderClan apprentice that she recognized, but the rest of them she didn't know.

The ThunderClan apprentice that she recognized, Foxpaw, padded over to her.

"What do you want?" Shadepath hissed at the ThunderClan apprentice.

"I *wanted* to just make friendly conversation, but it seems that you fish-breaths don't want to talk." Foxpaw retorted, annoyance gleaming in her dark yellow eyes. She stomped away toward a group of ShadowClan apprentices.

Shadepath just glared at her and stalked off.

Larkpaw rolled her eyes and continued looking at the other cats. She saw a brown tortoiseshell she-cat. Why did the she-cat look so... sad? Angry? No, that wasn't it... it was more like... spiteful. Was she alright? Should she talk to her?

She was snapped out of our thoughts as she heard cats. WindClan cats came bounding into the area, sitting down and the leader, deputy, and medicine cat hopping onto the Great Rock swiftly, honoring the title of agile moor runners.

"Alright. Since every Clan is here, we shall begin the Gathering!" Vulturestar yowled. His broad shoulders were visible through his gray pelt. "Finchstar, would you like to start?"

Finchstar dipped her brown head with darker brown markings toward Vulturestar, and meowed, "Of course."

"WindClan is doing well. We have plenty of rabbits and other prey, and our Clan is thriving. We also ran across quite a bothersome badger in out territory, but we chased it off. That is all." Finchstar meowed, taking a step back. "Vulturestar, how about you go next?"

Vulturestar nodded. "Yes, I will go next. ShadowClan is doing well. We have plenty of prey. The only concerning thing is that we also had to chase out a badger from our territory today. Morningmist bravely chased the badger away with her patrol. It headed toward ThunderClan territory, so please be careful, Thrushstar."

Vulturestar took a step back, nodding toward Thrushstar.

Thrushstar eyed him suspiciously. "Alright. I will heed your word and make sure to keep my patrols on the lookout. On that note, I will go next. We also chased off a badger a couple sunrises go. We have a new apprentice, though they are not here at the moment. That is all."

Troutstar took a small step forward. "We have a new warrior, Stonetooth."

Yowls of, "Stonetooth!" Rang throughout Fourtrees. Troutstar

waited until the yowls died down, and then continued.

"Fish are plentiful and practically leaping into our paws. Our Clan is healthy and thriving. We also encountered at badger. RiverClan is fine, however, and no major injuries were sustained. That is all." Troutstar dipped his head, taking a step back.

Thrushstar took a large step forward, eyeing Vulturestar.

"It's nice to know that you admit it." Thrushstar growled.

Vulturestar look at him in shock, his mouth open. "What are you talking about?! What are you accusing my Clan of!?" He hissed.

"Silverfur was found dead in her nest this morning- with the scent of badger on her!" Thrushstar snarled at him.

Chapter 2- Thrushstar's Vexation

"If you hadn't chased that badger into our territory, Silverfur would have still been alive!" Thrushstar hissed at the gray ShadowClan leader. Thrushstar's fur had begun to bristle, and his tail lashed back and forth. Vulturestar growled in response.

"ShadowClan did no such thing! It could have been WindClan! Or RiverClan! How do you know it's ShadowClan, and not that you frog-brains just weren't smart enough to keep watch over your camp!?" Vulturestar snarled, baring his teeth.

Larkpaw's brown eyes shone with fear and worry, dreading what would happen next. She looked up at the sky, searching for any sign of StarClan sending clouds to cover the moon- but there were none. The sky was clear of clouds, just twinkling with stars and the moon glowing bright.

Why isn't StarClan doing anything!? Larkpaw mentally shrieked. Her thought process was interrupted by a sharp response.

"You don't know the pain of losing your mate, Vulturestar!" Thrushstar yowled, flattening his ears. Larkpaw, caught up in the moment, leaped up onto the Great Rock and stepped in between the two angry leaders.

Cats stared at her in shock.

She heard a murmurs of disapproval. Troutstar gaped at her.

"Stop!" Larkpaw demanded. More murmers. *I just want the Clans to get along and be at peace!*

"Even if StarClan hasn't covered up the moon yet, that doesn't mean that we should wait until they do so! By then, it'll be too late! Gatherings are supposed to be a night of peace, not arguing and

fighting with each other!"

Thrushstar rounded on her. "You're just a mouse-brained apprentice! What would you know?!" Thrushstar growled.

Larkpaw instinctively took a step back, lowering her head.

"My apprentices are not mouse-brained!" Troutstar hissed.

The ThunderClan deputy, Amberfrost, took a step forward to Thrushstar and murmured something into his ear. Thrushstar turned toward Amberfrost.

"But she's just an apprentice! What would she know?!" Thrushstar hissed. Amberfrost meowed something into his ear again. Thrushstar growled softly and turned toward Vulturestar.

"Fine. We will stop arguing, as this apprentice requests. *However, ThunderClan* will not *back down.*" Thrushstar snarled. He hopped off of the Great Rock, followed by Amberfrost and Frostfern.

While hopping off of the Great Rock, Frostfern worriedly glanced up at the sky, toward the moon. She shook her head to herself, and trotted after Thrushstar.

Vulturestar growled, and hopped off the Great Rock. Morningmist meowed something to him, but he just shook his head quickly and padded toward ShadowClan's territory. Morningmist followed, along with Mudpool.

Larkpaw hopped down quickly, not looking at Troutstar. She padded quickly after Lilywhisker with her head down.

"Larkpaw." A voice from behind her meowed. She jumped.

She turned around to see Troutstar.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Larkpaw mewed frantically, lowering her head even more.

"Why would you do that?! Do you know how that made RiverClan look?" Troutstar asked, but he didn't wait for an answer. "It made us

appear as if we couldn't keep our apprentices in line- your actions were inmicable to RiverClan's reputation! And do you know how disrespectful it is for any cat *but* the leader to stand on the Great Rock without explicit permission?!" Troutstar growled at her.

"I'm sor-" Larkpaw started.

"I don't want to hear it!" Troutstar interrupted her. "You will be cleaning out the elder's den, every day, for an entire moon! And you will be checking them for ticks every day as well! I should delay your warrior ceremony for this- but I won't. Keep that in mind as a warning for next time; which I sincerely hope that there *isn't* a next time."

Larkpaw nodded her head solemnly. She padded after Lilywhisker toward camp.

Stonetooth was waiting by the camp entrance, sitting silently and diligently.

He didn't utter a single word, but his eyes asked what he was not allowed to say, 'How did it go? What happened?'

Larkpaw just looked at him and shook her head, and padded toward the apprentice's den.

She plopped down onto her nest, not caring that the moss had been all messed up. She fell into a restless, yet deep sleep.

Larkpaw blinked a couple of times, and groggily stood up. Recounting the events from last night, she instantly groaned and flumped back onto her nest, scattering some of the moss from her nest.

She felt Blossompaw shift beside her.

"Hey! Stop m-!" Blossompaw started to sneer. Larkpaw turned her head toward Blossompaw, opening one brown eye.

Blossompaw immediately looked away from her and inched to left, away from Larkpaw.

Larkpaw sighed, got up, and shook her short brown and white fur out to get the scraps of moss out. She padded toward the elder's den to start cleaning out their den. She expected the elders to ignore her like Blossompaw did, but they did exactly the opposite. She was met with a bombardment of questions and other comments.

When she walked into the den, nosing her way through the curtain of lichen, she was met with a chorus of meows.

"I've never seen an apprentice, or even a warrior jump onto the Great Rock without permission!" Leaffur purred in amusement. Larkpaw looked down in embarrassment.

"Meh. I don't see what all the fuss is about, except for the fact that she jumped onto the Great Rock without Troutstar's permission." Salmontail yawned.

"That's exactly what all of the fuss is about! She jumped onto the *Great Rock*, of all places!" Mudfoot growled softly, rolling his eyes.

"While I can see the error made, I can look past that, and see that she had good intentions, as well as her fault." Salmonfur rasped.

Larkpaw nodded gratefully toward Salmonfur, and started gathering up the stray scraps of moss from the elder's nests.

"Just because you're Troutstar's niece doesn't mean that you can do whatever you like and get away with it." Mudfoot muttered quietly- but not quiet enough so that Larkpaw wouldn't hear. She lowered her head, ashamed. She nosed the scraps of moss together into a pile.

"Oh, come on Mudfoot. Don't be so harsh on her." Leaffur meowed, licking her paw and drawing it over her ear.

Larkpaw heard a *thump*, and she saw Stonetooth on the floor of the elder's den. He had landed face-first, and his leg was wrapped in a piece of the lichen hanging from the den entrance.

Larkpaw rushed over towards Stonetooth.

"Are you ok, Stonetooth?!" Larkpaw mewled, helping Stonetooth up.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Stonetooth gave his chest fur a quick lick. "But it's you that you should be worried about!"

"Uh... About that..." Larkpaw muttered.

"I heard already, Larkpaw." Stonetooth playfully rolled his eyes, and gave her a gentle cuff on the ear. "What were you thinking!? That's disrespectful, not to mention it made us look bad."

Larkpaw lowered her head, waiting Stonetooth to give her a lecture. She didn't get what she expected, though.

"I can help you with the elder's den. You don't deserve the punishment- not that I'm saying this is a punishment, guys- you had good intentions." Stonetooth meowed, looking at the elders, and starting to nose the pile of dirty moss toward the entrance of the den.

Larkpaw shook her head no. "Sorry, but it's my job. I appreciate the help, but you don't have to."

Stonetooth sighed. "Fine. But if you need any help, just ask."

Larkpaw nodded, and got back to work cleaning the elder's den and checking them for ticks.

Chapter 3- Larkpaw's Anticipation

"Auuggghhhhh!" Larkpaw groaned. She had just finished washing off the mouse bile on her paws in the river. Gingerpaw stood beside her stiffly, a bundle of herbs in her mouth. The only thing that moved on Gingerpaw was her tail, which was lashing in annoyance, and her green eyes rolling and glaring at Larkpaw.

"Are you done whining?" Gingerpaw meowed through the herbs, rolling her eyes for the ninth time.

"I'm not whining, Gingerpaw." Larkpaw mewed, rubbing off some of the water on the nearby grass. "I'm stating my troubles."

"Apparently your "troubles' are the inability to say your 'troubles' in a non-whiny tone?" Gingerpaw rolled her yellow eyes, being careful to not drop any of the herbs.

Larkpaw glared at her. "Be quiet. It's not like I forced you to come with me and listen to me."

Gingerpaw curled her upper lip a bit. "Hmph. It's not my fault Featherleaf needs more marigold and burdock root. Plus, leaf-fall is coming soon, and we have to start stocking up on catmint."

Larkpaw snorted.

"And, I need a warrior to defend me if I'm attacked by a fox or something." Gingerpaw huffed.

Larkpaw growled. "I'm not a warrior yet and you know it."

"And if I do?" Gingerpaw smirked.

"You shouldn't be talking! You don't have your full medicine cat name yet, minnow-brain!" Larkpaw sneered, stalking off toward camp, sulking. "Plus, Featherleaf didn't say you needed another cat

to come with you!"

Gingerpaw muttered something under her breath, and padded toward camp as well, not speaking to Larkpaw the whole way there.

Larkpaw kept sulking at camp, as well.

"That piece of fox- dung, Gingerpaw... Arrogant, minnow-brained, Gingerpaw...!" Larkpaw grumbled under her breath once Gingerpaw was gone.

"You know what, I'm going hunting, to clear my head." Larkpaw mumbled, swiveling around to exit the camp again. Larkpaw sprinted toward the river, loving the feeling of the wind brushing through her short brown and white fur. Larkpaw screeched to a halt once she saw the river, and padded toward the edge of the river.

Larkpaw crouched down slightly, and looked into the river for fish. The river seemed to sparkle like the stars in Silverpelt at night.

Larkpaw waited silently for any fish to dart by. She narrowed her eyes slightly, seeing no fish in the river. She spaced out a bit, thinking while she waited for fish to come by.

I know the Gathering was a while ago, but I just can't help still thinking about the dead queen that was announced in ThunderClan. Silverfur, I'm sure it was. Larkpaw thought. *But why would a queen, of all cats, be murdered in cold blood? I could understand if the cat was a warrior- they're often involved in the fighting and conflict between Clans. But a queen? It just doesn't seem right- the pieces just don't fit together.*

Larkpaw shook her head, snapping out of her thoughts. When she glanced into the river, she saw her dazed expression. She blinked a couple times, trying to think clearly and focus on hunting. When she opened her eyes again, she didn't see her reflection anymore. She saw a brown, rotting rose, with thorns inside of the petals instead of on the stem. The thorns seemed to be ripping through the petals, destroying them. The stem was green at the root, but faded into a rotting brown, blending in with the sickly petals. The greener

part of the stem sprouted from ThunderClan's side of the river, and the rest of the stem branched out toward the RiverClan border. It stopped there, connecting the two sides of the river.

"What in the name of StarClan?.." Larkpaw questioned. She touched her paw to the surface of the water, but when her paw made contact with the rose in the water, it rippled, and was no longer there.

"What?.. How?.. Why?.." Larkpaw asked herself incredulously. "What was that?"

Was that an omen or something? I'm not even a medicine cat! Larkpaw thought.

"Whatever- I'll just keep looking for fish..." Larkpaw mewed uncertainly to herself. She shook her head to clear her mind. She then unsheathed her claws on her right paw, and raised it.

She saw a salmon dart by, and as soon as it swam near her again, she swooped her paw down, quickly and carefully, and hooked the fish onto her claw. She brought her paw up quickly before the fish could even move its fin, and dropped it onto the ground next to her. The fish flopped a bit, but Larkpaw moved it back a bit so that it wouldn't flop back into the water.

Larkpaw repeated the process several more times until she had caught seven more fish. She had caught three salmon, including the one she had caught before, two pikes, two carps, and a trout.

"How long was I out fishing?.." Larkpaw asked herself. The sun had barely moved from its last position.

"I must have not been here for very long... Strange... It seemed like I was here for a sunrise." Larkpaw meowed to herself. She shrugged, picked up three of the fish by the tail, and began carrying them back to camp.

"Looks like I'll have to make at least three trips..." Larkpaw observed. "If I can carry three right now, if I want to get these fish to camp the quickest, I'll probably have to make three trips, unless I

can lug five fish by the tail back to camp in my mouth. I can barely hold three right now."

Larkpaw arrived at camp, carrying her fresh-kill. She dropped it onto the pile, then ran off to retrieve her other fish. Once she had retrieved all of her fish, and dropped the last two onto the pile, she turned around to sit in the shade and groom herself. Dirt littered her pelt, with it almost blending in with the slightly darker brown on her fur, and her paws ached from running to and from camp so many times. Larkpaw slowly padded over to the shady area near the apprentice's den. She was about to sit down, but was interrupted by Carptail.

"Larkpaw, there you are. Lilywhisker wants you to go on a hunting patrol." Carptail meowed. His white fur seemed dirtier than usual, and his right eye seemed duller than usual. His other eye seemed to glow, however.

Larkpaw groaned, and sat down in the shade anyway.

"I was literally *just* out hunting. Those eight fish on top of the pile didn't just *appear* out of thin air." Larkpaw growled slightly. Carptail cocked his head.

"Is that so?" Carptail asked. "Well, let me ask Lilywhisker about it."

Carptail padded off toward Lilywhisker, who was underneath the High Rock, organizing the afternoon hunting and border patrols. Larkpaw saw Carptail meow something to Lilywhisker, who meowed something back.

Larkpaw began cleaning herself, cleaning off her paws, which had almost as much dust on them as the amount of stars in Silverpelt. She drew her paw over her ears, and continued grooming herself until she was clean and sleek as ever.

She closed her eyes for a moment, but was prodded in the shoulder roughly by a cat. Larkpaw irritatedly opened an eye.

"Lilywhisker says that you can have the hunting patrol off, but she wants to know if whether or not you did your elder's duties for

today." Carptail reported.

"Tell her that, yes, I did. The mouse bile was disgusting." Larkpaw groaned. Carptail nodded, and padded off toward Lilywhisker.

Larkpaw lie down, and rested her head on her paws. She thought about how busy her day had been so far- it was a lot busier than most of her other days. She had went on the dawn patrol, helped reinforce the nursery this morning, to prevent an incident like ThunderClan with the badger, had to clean out the elder's den twice thanks to Salmonfur, had to re-check Mudfoot for fleas, went fishing and caught a sizable amount of fish, and had to lug the fish to camp.

While that was how a lot of her days were, you could usually knock out a task of two from the list. Larkpaw blinked sleepily. She yawned, and her eyes drooped. The last thing she remembered was padding into the apprentice's den and flopping onto her nest.

Larkpaw awoke to someone roughly prodding her shoulder. Her eyes shot open to see a solid dark gray pelt.

"Stonetooth?" Larkpaw asked grumpily. "What do you want?"

"That's no way to talk to your kithood friend. Especially the one who helped you put wet moss in Oakface's nest as a 'paw." Stonetooth teased her, flicking his long tail.

"I remember Oakface... It's a shame greencough had to take him. At least he's in StarClan now... Anyways, just because you used to be my partner in crime doesn't mean you get special treatment." Larkpaw playfully rolled her eyes. She sat up, and shook out scraps of moss from her short pelt.

"Of course it does," Stonetooth purred, "But anyways, Lilywhisker wants you for your hunting assessment!"

"Huh-? My assessmen- oh, wait, that's right!" Larkpaw meowed, a wave of excitement washing over her, vanquishing any bit of sleepiness that was left. "Bye, Stonetooth, gotta go!"

As Larkpaw sprinted out of the den, she heard Stonetooth purr in amusement. When she reached the camp entrance, she saw Lilywhisker murmuring to herself.

"Shadepath should be here soon." Lilywhisker meowed quietly to herself.

"I'm here!" Larkpaw mewed loudly. Lilywhisker's brown and white head whipped toward Larkpaw in surprise.

"What in the name of StarClan-!" Lilywhisker yelped.

"Sorry! I'm just excited!" Larkpaw apologized. Lilywhisker just sighed and shook her head, turning away. Larkpaw fidgeted. After what seemed like moons, Shadepath came running in through the camp entrance, a pike in her mouth. Shadepath ran over to the fresh-kill pile, deposited her prey, and ran back to the camp entrance where Larkpaw and Lilywhisker were.

"Sorry I'm late!" Shadepath panted. Lilywhisker's whiskers twitched in annoyance.

"It's fine." Lilywhisker meowed gruffly. "But you'd think that *you* were the apprentice, you're so late." Shadepath grinned sheepishly, and shifted her paws uncomfortably.

"Let's get the assessment started, shall we?" Shadepath meowed sheepishly, changing the subject. Lilywhisker rolled her eyes, but nodded nonetheless.

"Yes!" Larkpaw cheered, and ran off toward the stream.

Larkpaw hooked her claw onto a carp, and dropped it onto the pile she had already collected. She had been hunting for quite a while, and it seemed like the fish had practically been leaping into her paws.

Larkpaw had just hooked another trout onto her claw when she saw a brown, rotting, rose blow across the river, being carried by the wind- it had blown over from ThunderClan's side of the river, and

looked just like the strange rose she had saw in the river. The thorns poked out of the petals, ripping them. Larkpaw squinted at it, confused. The rotting rose blew closer to the ground, and before Larkpaw could think, or even breath, the trout had been thrown on top of her pile of fish, and Larkpaw leaped into the air, twisting her abdomen, and her two front paws touched the rotting rose. She clapped her paws together, capturing the rose, and landed on four feet. She dropped the rose at her feet.

"What is this?.." Larkpaw asked herself. "This must definitely be an omen. It's occurred more than once today. It *must* be an omen."

Larkpaw bent down to pick up the rose in her mouth, which was probably not the best way to transport it, but what other choice did she have? When her jaws clamped shut, she didn't feel anything- just air.

"Huh?" Larkpaw mewed, confused. Then, she saw the rose blow over to WindClan territory. "Well, can't do anything about that now..."

Larkpaw caught a couple more fish, and then saw Shadepath padding toward her.

"Nice job, Larkpaw! That's quite a lot of fish you have there! That's almost twice as much as some other apprentices catch on their assessment!" Shadepath praised her. Larkpaw looked down at her paws, embarrassed, yet flattered.

"It was nothing... I was just doing what you taught me." Larkpaw meowed, shuffling her paws. Shadepath purred.

"It wasn't all me. I just taught you how to do it. The rest was up to you." Shadepath told Larkpaw. Larkpaw quickly changed the subject, embarrassed.

"So, did I pass?" Larkpaw asked nervously. Shadepath purred.

"What do you think? Of course you did! That's a lot of fish you have there- and those water voles are fairly plump, too!" Shadepath smiled. Larkpaw purred.

"Yes!" Larkpaw cheered. Her long, fluffy tail lashed in excitement. "So, when will my warrior ceremony be? What will my warrior name be? Will I still have to clean out the elder's den?! When-"

"Stop right there, Larkpaw. I don't know the answers to any of your questions, except for the first one. I talked to Troutstar, and he said that if you passed, your ceremony will be right before moonhigh." Shadepath meowed to Larkpaw.

Larkpaw looked up at the sky- the sun was barely showing, and you could barely see it on the horizon, so she had to hurry if she wanted to tell Stonetooth. "Alright! Can I go back to camp and tell Stonetooth?"

"Of course." Shadepath purred. Larkpaw ran off to camp to tell Stonetooth.

"Wait-! I forgot to tell you to take the fish back to camp-!" Shadepath called after Larkpaw. It was no use, however, as Larkpaw was already out of reach of Shadepath's voice. She sighed.

"I guess I'll just have to take the fish back, instead." Shadepath mused, picking up some of the fish. She padded after a sprinting Larkpaw, fish dangling by their tails in her jaw.

"Stonetooth! Stonetooth, guess what!" Larkpaw yowled as soon as she got to camp. Most of the cats outside stopped dead in their tracks and stared at Larkpaw's yowl.

"Umm... Sorry..!" Larkpaw apologized sheepishly. "Do any of you know where Stonetooth is?"

"He's in here!" Mudfoot poked his head out of the elder's den.

"Ok, thanks!" Larkpaw meowed, and ran into the elder's den. She almost bowled into Mudfoot, but turned sharply, narrowly avoiding him. She saw Stonetooth talking to Leaffur.

"Ah, yes. I remember when Troutstar was a warrior. An apprentice, actually, but not a kit. I have heard rumors that as a kit, Troutstar

left camp multiple times." Leaffur reminisced. "Troutstar, as an apprentice, was very irresponsible. He almost always forgot about training. Somehow he managed to become a warrior, and even I'm not exactly sure how, to this day. Anyways, as a warrior, Troutstar, back then Trout*talon*, learned to shape up. He became one of the most respected and reliable warriors. By the time he had trained his apprentice, everyone knew he would be deputy when the time came. And sure enough, it did."

Stonetooth looked uncomfortable. "Um... I didn't ask about Troutstar as a warrior- I asked about-"

"You asked about Larkpaw, so I was telling you a story about her uncle. I was about to tell you how her mother knew her father, Troutstar's brother, through Troutstar-" Leaffur started to explain, but saw Larkpaw out of the corner of her eye. "Oh, hello there, Larkpaw! Stonetooth was just asking about-"

Stonetooth swatted his paw at Leaffur. "I already know everything about her parents! I was asking - you know what, never mind!"

Larkpaw purred. "Why were you asking *Leaffur* about me?"

"No reason!" Stonetooth meowed quickly.

"Anyways, I have something to tell you!" Larkpaw exclaimed happily. "Guess what!"

"What?" Stonetooth asked, amusement and curiosity glinting in his eyes.

"Shadepath said that she talked with Troutstar, and guess what! Shadepath said that if I passed my hunting part of my assessment, since I already did my battle training assessment, that my warrior ceremony would be tonight, right before moonhigh!" Larkpaw meowed loudly, bouncing on her paws slightly. Stonetooth's eyes lit up.

"Really? Nice, Larkpaw!" Stonetooth meowed proudly to her. "But I bet you can't catch more fish than me tomorrow."

"You wish!" Larkpaw smiled, her eyes shining. "We'll see about that!

Plus, now we're warriors, so we can go out without another warrior!"

"Alright then. We'll see, Larkpaw." Stonetooth purred. Larkpaw purred as well. She was about to answer, but heard Troutstar yowl something from outside.

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather here beneath the Highrock to hear my words!" Troutstar's yowl echoed throughout camp, mighty and booming.

"Come on, Stonetooth!" Larkpaw mewed, running out of the elder's den. Stonetooth purred, and padded after her.

Larkpaw sat in the center of the crowd of cats, her eyes gleaming with excitement and anticipation. Once the idle meows died down, Troutstar started to speak.

"I, Troutstar, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. She has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend her to you as a warrior in her turn." Troutstar spoke, looking up at the sky. The sunset seemed especially vivid tonight to Larkpaw, whether it was because it was Larkpaw's warrior ceremony was today, she didn't know. "Larkpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"Yes, of cour-! I mean, I do." Larkpaw meowed loud and clear, quickly composing herself. *Mrrrow*s of laughter could clearly be heard, and Larkpaw smiled sheepishly, embarrassed.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Larkpaw, from this moment you will be known as Larklight, after your bright, enthusiastic nature. StarClan honors your cleverness and enthusiasm to serve your Clan, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan." Troutstar declared, his gray-green eyes gleaming with pride. The first yowl of Larklight's warrior name came from Stonetooth.

"Larklight!" Stonetooth yowled. Larklight shot a smile at him before padding up to the bottom of the Highrock. Larklight gave

Troutstar's shoulder a lick, and turned around to look at her Clanmates.

"Larklight! Larklight! Larklight! Larklight! Larklight!"

Once the yowls died down, Stonetooth ran up to her.

"Have fun staying completely silent for the night." Stonetooth teased her. Larklight pouted slightly.

"Don't remind me." Larklight meowed, padding toward the camp entrance. Lilywhisker nodded toward her, turning back to go to the warrior's den to sleep. Stonetooth purred.

"Well then, Lark*light*, have a good night staying quiet." Stonetooth purred, turning around to the warrior's den to sleep.

Larklight sighed slightly, sitting down by the camp entrance. She stared at the moon, thinking about what tomorrow would be like. Her first day as a warrior of RiverClan. She couldn't wait!

Tonight would be a *very* long night for Larklight.

Chapter 4- Larklight's Vigil

Larklight sat silently in front of the camp entrance, staring at the moon. The crescent of white light shone brightly, illuminating Larklight's surroundings. The river sat still, not moving in the slightest. The river looked like ice, still and silent, yet beautiful. The rocks and dirt which Larklight sat on felt slightly more comfortable than usual, though whether it was because tonight was special, or she had been sitting there for a while, Larklight didn't know.

Larklight blinked, and mentally groaned.

Why do I have to stay silent for the whole night? I can't possibly go that long without talking... And I'm so tired... But still, I'm a warrior now! And, this gives me time to think without any interruptions. Larklight thought.

Of all cats to be murdered, why a queen? I could understand if a warrior was killed, but a queen? Especially with unborn kits... Those poor kits. They won't be able to live the life of a warrior, or a medicine cat if one of them chose. Larklight thought somberly. *I wonder what cat would've killed a* **queen***, of all cats. Maybe it was truly a badger, as Thrushstar said, but ThunderClan has a tendency to make themselves look stronger than they really are. Like that one time when Sycamorestar said that ThunderClan had plenty of prey, but in truth, the prey had barely even come out of their burrows- And the only way the other Clans knew was because of one of their blabber mouthed apprentices. You'd think they'd ask for help or something!*

Larklight stared at the stars. They were truly beautiful, shining in the dark blue, almost black sky. Larklight mentally sighed- she had been keeping watch for a little more than half the night now.

Just a little less than half a night... Larkpaw reminded herself.

I can't wait for tomorrow when I can go hunting with Stonetooth...

"Will you stop thrashing around!?" Rainear growled softly to Stonetooth, his blue eyes flashing with annoyance. Stonetooth's head shot up, scattering some of the moss from his nest.

"Sorry, Rainear!" Stonetooth apologized quietly, bolting up. Rainear grunted.

"If you were sorry, you wouldn't have done it, you minnow-brain." Rainear scoffed, putting his head back down on his paws. Stonetooth snorted slightly, offended.

"So *I'm* the minnow-brain here?!" Stonetooth hissed softly.

"Yes." Rainear replied grumpily.

"You can't even confess properly to Ripplereed!" Stonetooth snorted.

"Leave her out of this." Rainear snarled quietly, being careful to not disturb any of the other warriors. "Besides, you really shouldn't be talking now, should you?"

Stonetooth flattened his ears. Rainear smirked in satisfaction.

"Shut up." Stonetooth grunted, lying back down. He turned away from Rainear. Rainear let out a snort of satisfaction, and went back to sleep, his scruffy fur blowing slightly in the wind that blew through the lichen-draped den.

"Is it almost leaf-fall already?.." Stonetooth murmured quietly to himself, making sure to not disturb any of the other warriors up by meowing nonsense to himself.

*Was Rainear talking about..? No, he couldn't have been... It's not **that** obvious, is it?..* Stonetooth thought. *I mean, I know it wasn't exactly subtle, but it wasn't **obvious**... Right?..*

Stonetooth sighed, and lie back down in his nest, sleeping lightly and restlessly.

Stonetooth woke up the next day at dawn. He stood and and

stretched quickly. He shook out the scraps of moss from his fur and yawned.

I should go see how Larklight did on her vigil. Stonetooth thought. He smiled at the thought. *She probably fell asleep.*

He padded over to the camp entrance to find Larklight sitting at outside of the camp entrance, staring at the dawn sky.

"Hello." Stonetooth purred, knowing very well that Larklight couldn't speak until the sun was up a bit more, halfway to where the sun was at noon. Larklight shot a playful glare at him.

I can't talk yet and you know it! Larklight's eyes seemed to say. Her white tail, which had been wrapped around her paws, now waved in the air irritatedly. She wanted to talk so badly! Stonetooth smirked in satisfaction.

"So, how was your vigil?" Stonetooth purred, sitting down next to her. Larklight's eye twitched slightly.

Stop taunting me, you great big lump of fur! Larklight wanted to reply indignantly- but the Warrior Code prevented her from doing so.

Stonetooth snickered. He was about to meow something else, but was interrupted by Shadepath.

Shadepath rested her tail on top of Larklight's back.

"You can talk now." Shadepath purred. Larklight sighed in relief.

"Thank StarClan! I thought I'd explode if I couldn't talk soon!" Larklight meowed loudly, her tail waving avidly. "Plus, Stonetooth kept taunting me, and asking me mouse-brained questions. Well, they weren't exactly mouse-brained, but he kept asking me questions when he knew I couldn't talk!"

Shadepath rolled her eyes slightly.

"Anyways, am I able to rest now? I'm kind of tired." Larklight mewed, yawning a bit.

"Thank StarClan, I thought you'd never ask." Stonetooth purred. Larklight cuffed his ear. Not exactly the gentlest of cuffs.

"*Owwww!* What was *that* for?!" Stonetooth complained, shaking his head.

"What was the snobby remark for?" Larklight countered, smiling slightly. Stonetooth pouted, but didn't answer.

Shadepath purred in amusement. "Yes, Larklight, you can go and rest now."

"Thank StarClan." Larklight meowed, padding off into camp, heading for the warrior's den. Stonetooth purred watching her. Shadepath cuffed his ear roughly.

"Owwww! Twice in a day! What in the name of StarClan have I done to deserve that?!" Stonetooth mumbled grumpily to Shadepath, rubbing his ear. Shadepath rolled her eyes and just walked away, leaving Stonetooth looking exasperated.

A few hours later, about a couple of hours before noon...

Larklight was roughly prodded awake by a dappled paw. Larklight grunted, turning away from the impact.

"Wake up, you slowpoke." Maplefur mewed, prodding Larklight once more. "Lilywhisker wants you on a border patrol with me and Ripplereed."

Larklight bit her lip. "But I promised Stonetooth that I'd-" She started to explain, but was cut short. Ripplereed poked her brown head in the warrior's den.

"Hurry up, you lazy lump of fur! Get on the patrol!" Ripplereed ordered the warriors. Maplefur rolled her eyes, but padded out of the den anyways without question.

Larklight groaned and stood up. She shook out a couple scraps of moss from her brown and white pelt and padded out of the warrior's den.

I still have to thank Stonetooth for preparing a nest for me before I actually moved into the warrior's den, Larklight thought to herself. *That was sweet of him.*

Larklight padded up to Lilywhisker.

"Hey, Lilywhisker? I was wondering... I kind of already made plans with Stonetooth to go hunting." Larklight meowed a bit sheepishly. "Is it alright if-"

Lilywhisker cut her off. "No. Outings with friends can wait- Clan duties *cannot*."

Larklight opened her mouth to speak, but quickly shut it, deciding that it wouldn't exactly be the wisest choice to argue with the deputy. She nodded solemnly.

"Can I at least tell Stonetooth that I can't go hunting with him?" Larklight asked hopefully. Lilywhisker sighed.

"Fine, but make it quick." Lilywhisker meowed, annoyed. Larklight thanked her and raced off.

"I swear, ever since they were kits, they've been joined at the flank." Lilywhisker muttered under her breath.

"Frog dung. Maybe tomorrow?" Stonetooth asked hopefully, slightly annoyed at Lilywhisker. Larklight had just finished explaining the situation to Stonetooth.

"Of course! That is, if Lilywhsiker doesn't order me to do anything else." Larklight meowed, flicking her wispy tail aloofly.

"Alright. See you later?" Stonetooth asked hopefully.

"Of course." Larklight purred. She padded away toward Maplefur and Ripplereed.

"Are you ready now?" Ripplereed meowed, annoyed. Her tail-tip flicked impatiently.

"Yes," Larklight meowed. "So where are we patrolling?"

"The ThunderClan border. We have been much too lenient about them attempting to catch fish on Sunningrocks." Ripplereed meowed, annoyance lacing her meow.

Larklight nodded and followed the two older warriors.

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Ripplereed padded ahead grumpily.

"Why is she always so grumpy?" Maplefur whispered to Larklight. Larklight shrugged.

Ripplereed jerked her head toward the two warriors behind her.

"I can still hear you, minnow-brains." Ripplereed hissed. Maplefur flinched.

Larklight raised a cat-brow, but kept following until they reached Sunningrocks, where Ripplereed had stopped abruptly. She was about to ask why they had stopped, but Ripplereed, sensing Larklight's curiosity, slapped her tail over Larklight's mouth to prevent her from speaking. Larklight growled slightly. She craned her neck upwards in order to see why the patrol had stopped. She didn't see anything noteworthy at first, but then saw ThunderClan cats. She spotted three ThunderClan cats across the river on Sunningtocks, trying to catch fish. Key word- *trying*.

She recognized the ginger tortoiseshell cat with green eyes as Sorrelfur, but she didn't recognize the other two. She saw two apprentices as well. One was a rather large red tabby tom, and the other was a long-legged tawny she-cat.

"Foxpaw, Redpaw, you're supposed the have your claws sheathed." Sorrelfur meowed to the two apprentices.

"Uh-huh? Why are you giving *us* advice when you don't even know how to catch fish, exactly?" The red tabby tom meowed, obviously annoyed.

"Plus that's not how the fish-faces catch them." The tawny she-cat meowed, obviously annoyed as well.

"Well then why don't *you* show *me* how to catch a fish?!" Sorrelfur growled. The red tabby tom looked apprehensive, whereas the tawny she-cat looked sheepish.

"This is on you, Redpaw!" The tawny she-cat, who was probably Foxpaw, meowed almost immediately. Foxpaw took a couple steps back.

Redpaw silently seethed. "*Foxpaw*!"

Maplefur watched the scenario play out in amusement.

"See, Ripplereed? There's nothing to-" Maplefur started to meow, but before she could finish speaking, Ripplereed jumped into the river and started swimming across to Sunningrocks.

"That minnow-brained fool!" Maplefur hissed. "She'll die! She's outnumbered!"

"Not if we go with her." Larklight meowed defiantly.

And with that, she jumped into the river, her paws churning through the water.

Chapter 5- Sorrelfur's Fur

Maplefur let out a huff of exasperation.

"Larklight, you minnow-brain!" Maplefur growled. She hopped in after Larklight.

"Uh- Sorrelfur, you might want to take a look at that." Foxpaw meowed apprehensively to Sorrelfur. Sorrelfur whipped her head toward the river.

"Fox dung!" Sorrelfur cursed. She arched her back, claws unsheathed, ready to attack. Redpaw did the same, and Foxpaw looked unsure of what to do.

Ripplereed was far ahead and was nearly at Sunningrocks. She hopped up once she arrived at her destination, not walking toward the ThunderClan cats. She waited for them to make the first move.

"What are we waiting for?!" Redpaw hissed. He lunged at Ripplereed.

"*No!*" Maplefur screeched. She put on a burst of speed swimming. Larklight's paws churned through the water, and she hopped up onto Sunningrocks. She lunged at Sorrelfur.

Ripplereed sidestepped swiftly, leaving Redpaw off-balance on the edge of Sunningrocks. Ripplereed kicked him in the face with her hind legs, knocking him into a shallow part of the river. Ripplereed hopped in after him, landing squarely on top of him. She hooked his ear with an unsheathed claw, leaving a nasty cut.

As soon as Redpaw got his face out of the water to gasp for air, Ripplereed raised a paw and slammed it directly on top of the apprentice's head, knocking his face back into the water. The apprentice gasped for air, but he couldn't breathe underwater. He shot his head upwards, but Ripplereed smacked his head right back down. Redpaw's limbs flailed as he tried to resurface and breathe.

Larklight jumped at Sorrelfur and clawed at Sorrelfur's face, leaving a nasty scratch. Sorrelfur snarled, and leapt back. Sorrelfur reared on her hind legs, ready to strike her paws down onto Larklight's head, but Larklight stepped to the side, and, taking advantage of her exposed belly, Larklight swiped her unsheathed claws vertically down Sorrelfur's belly. Sorrelfur hissed in pain and dropped down onto all fours. She swiped at Larklight's eye, cutting her eyelid and leaving a scratch. Larklight growled.

Sorrelfur turned to hit Larklight once more, but was distracted by Ripplereed attacking Redpaw brutally. Redpaw hadn't managed to even give Ripplereed a scratch. Ripplereed watched, unfazed as Redpaw gasped for air. Ripplereed was considerate enough to let Redpaw gasp for air once, but once Redpaw had inhaled, Ripplereed slammed his head back down, into the water. Sorrelfur gasped, and ran over to the two cats.

Maplefur, meanwhile, was battling Foxpaw. Maplefur had given Foxpaw a couple of nasty scratches, but Foxpaw had managed to land a blow on Maplefur's belly, which had left a deep gash. Larklight swiveled around and charged at the ThunderClan apprentice, scratching her right on the muzzle. Foxpaw screeched in pain, and whipped her head toward Larklight. Foxpaw aimed a blow at Larklight's eyes, but missed, instead hitting her ear. Foxpaw hissed in frustration, and crouched down, her tail waving in the air. Foxpaw bit down hard on Larklight's hind leg, feeling he metallic taste of blood on her tongue and feeling a hard, smooth surface- the bone. She bit down harder, and Larklight screeched in pain. Larklight swiped at Foxpaw's face, swiping wildly. Maplefur watched helplessly, but then saw Foxpaw's tail, sticking up in the air. Maplefur took advantage of Foxpaw focusing on Larklight and Foxpaw's tail being unattended to, and bit down on her tail. Maplefur yanked as hard as she could.

Foxpaw screeched and led go of Larklight's leg.

Larklight blinked the blood out of her eyes. She slashed at Foxpaw's nose, cutting it. Foxpaw yanked her tail away from Maplefur's jaws, and swiped back at Larklight, hitting her nose. Foxpaw let out a yowl.

"Sorrelfur! Help!" Foxpaw yowled. Foxpaw backed up, and when Sorrelfur didn't come, she whirled around and raced off toward the ThunderClan camp.

"Serves you right, you prey-stealing little-" Maplefur called after her, but was interrupted by Larklight's tail being slapped across her mouth.

"Maplefur!" Larklight scolded the warrior. Maplefur looked very sheepish.

"Anyways, come on! Let's go help Ripplereed!" Larklight meowed, turning around toward the river, and racing off, limping harshly because of her leg wound. Maplefur followed, hissing in pain from the belly wound.

Ripplereed had received a scratch on her muzzle and chest, but nothing too major. Ripplereed had managed to get Sorrelfur pinned down. Meanwhile, Redpaw, who had been knocked out, lie in the shallows of the water by Sunningrocks, tongue lolling.

Sorrelfur had been pummeling at Ripplereed's belly with her hind legs, but had only managed to land a scratch. Ripplereed reared up on her hind legs, and Sorrelfur moved to escape, but she was too late. Ripplereed landed a hard blow on her head, knocking the ginger she-cat out cold.

"That's all of them." Ripplereed sniffed triumphantly, with a hint of indigance. "That'll teach them not to fish in *our* river."

"Are you sure it was necessary to knock them all out? With the exception of that tawny apprentice..." Maplefur asked tentatively.

"Of course it was. Plus, now the apprentice can tell them to stop fishing!" Ripplereed snapped.

"Don't you mean *attempt* fishing?" Maplefur snorted.

"Yes, whatever." Ripplereed rolled her eyes. "Now let's get back to camp and tell Troutstar what we found."

The two other cats nodded, and the three set off for camp.

"But, like Maplefur said, are you sure it was *really* the best idea to knock those two cats out?" Larklight asked. "After all, it may spark some conflict and grudges from ThunderClan."

Ripplereed snorted. "We don't need other Clan's help."

Larklight opened her mouth to reply, but thought the better of that idea and closed it. As they got closer to camp, Larklight saw Gingerpaw with her head in a bush.

Larklight grinned and rolled her eyes. "Gingerpaw, I highly doubt you'll find any herbs in there."

Gingerpaw whipped around, her light green eyes shining with curiosity- and was that a hint of fear in her eyes? Perhaps it was, but what for? After all, what was there to be afraid of in a *bush*?

"Well, maybe I will!" Gingerpaw retorted, her light green eyes reverting to their usual sharpness and spontaneousness. "Besides, what would you know?! *You're* not medicine cat, *or* a medicine cat apprentice like me!"

And with that, Gingerpaw turned on her heel and stalked off toward camp.

"What's up with her?" Maplefur whispered to Larklight. "I mean, she's really sassy all of the time, but she was even more sassy this time. And that's saying a lot, considering it's *Gingerpaw* that we're talking about here."

"Agreed." Larklight whispered back. "Maybe I'll try and squeeze it out of her later."

Maplefur was about to respond, but was interrupted by a sharp meow from Ripplereed.

"Get moving, you slow slugs! We still have to report to Troutstar!" Ripplereed barked, her eyes just challenging either of them to defy her.

Maplefur nodded quickly, and meekly kept following Ripplereed.

Larklight, however, stayed behind to investigate the bush. She padded over to the leafy green, peering into through the leaves and branches. She swatted some stubborn branches that wouldn't go away, only for them to just hit her in the face. Again. And again. And *again*.

She growled in frustration, and shoved her head into the bush, ignoring the branches that slapped her. She shook her head, and was about to yank her head out of the bush when she felt something sharp graze her muzzle.

"Ow!" She yelped, jumping back. "What in the name of StarClan was that!?"

She put her head back into the bush, searching for the thing that had scratched her. She was about to give up once more, but then saw a rotting rose- the same one she had seen during her hunting assessment.

She gasped, and saw the rose up close. It's petals had decayed, rotting away and shriveling, a shell of the former beauty it had been. The stem had blackened and browned, making it look sickening. The only thing that seemed alive, the thing that seemed to thrive when the rest had given up- were the thorns. The thorns were needle sharp, and were green as the greenleaf grass. Larklight wanted to grab it to show the Clan, but she that if she did, the thorns would scratch her mouth.

She pulled her head out of the bush, and slowly started padding back to camp.

What was that?

Wasn't that the same rose I saw while I was hunting a day ago?